

1 Timothy 5:17-21
Instructions to Timothy
Fight, Keep Fighting, Finish!

Double honor, accusations, and partiality!



More instruction to church leaders and for churches regarding church leadership. The first one is to give elder-overseers honor – and the ones that teach, double honor! Now you might think that it is inappropriate for me to get up and speak to the congregation that they perhaps need to honor me and the other board members – perhaps even more than you already do. But, again, I don't have a choice. It's next up on the batting order of our text, so I am obligated to deal with it. Now, if I thought this church was doing poorly in this regard, this might seem self-serving and overbearing. *"You need to honor me more! In fact, you need to honor me twice as much as you honor anyone else in our church!"* But I am not saying that. I don't need more of your honor! You've done quite well with me! My ego does not need constant feeding. I love what I do, am happy and content, and that is enough reward for me in itself! Now if enough of you **DIS**-honored me, I'm sure I would not be so content. But purely because I know that if churches will not honor their pastors and leadership, then they cannot be led! Every organization needs leadership to survive, and good leadership to flourish! When the rank and file stop following their leaders, chaos ensues! Attitudes putrefy, people quit supporting the church, no one listens, people are carping and complaining and finding fault/pointing fingers. Then people stop serving, nothing gets done! Of course, under those conditions, the church is going nowhere, and people start abandoning the church like ticks crawling off the carcass of a dead deer to go looking for a live one! And so do Christians who are discontent with their church's leadership! Or they stay and things go from bad to worse, and they die with the church. Believe me, it happens, and not infrequently, when people give themselves permission to act in un-Christ-like ways toward each other. BTW - ticks really do that, and hunters have to be careful when handling a fresh kill, because the ticks are detaching almost immediately and crawling their way to the surface of the fur, looking for any kind of a new and living host,.. and because ticks love people too!



Giving **"double honor"** says more about the people giving the honor than the people receiving it. It is good, healthy trait for people to do the appropriate thing! Respect provides for a straight and smooth highway to the future, while **dis**respect builds a very crooked and bumpy road ahead! It is appropriate to show respect to the leaders of a church, to listen to them and respect their judgment. They will not always be right, but that is still no reason to show disrespect! It is not wrong to disagree with leadership, but always wrong to do it **dis**respectfully. The same rule applies to everyone we interact with in the church! The only time that does not apply is when leadership or a layperson has shown to most everyone a consistent pattern of doing the wrong thing - of approving unwise or ungodly actions, or of being arrogant and treating people badly! Then a congregation **STILL** does not have permission by God to treat their pastor, elder board, or each other with unrestrained anger, with disdain, or to belittle and/or insult them! When someone insults **us**, Christ's instructions are to not answer in kind, but to answer softly and with respect! When someone overtly disrespects us, we don't **return** disrespect, but return good for evil! **[1 Pet. 3:9]**

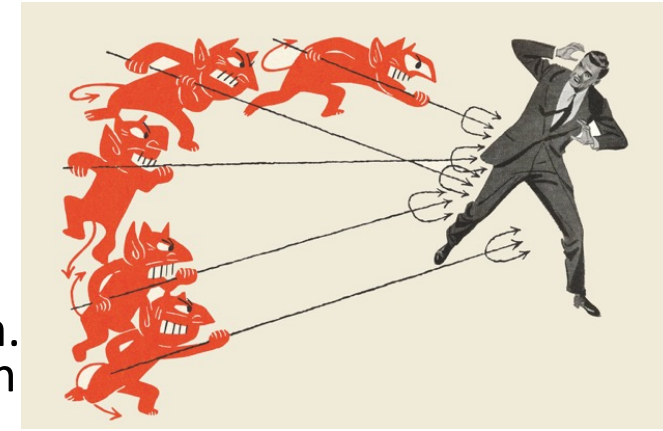
But this passage is also about a congregation about honoring their pastor or pastors, by being financially generous with them. He should not be kept poor and hungry is what this little adage is illustrating. It is either a very poor church or a poor excuse for a church that does this to their pastor, and if his has anything on the ball, they will not keep him for long! So, this is speaking of supporting him while he prepares his teaching materials, and sermons, and while he cares for the needs of the congregation – weddings, funerals, counseling, planning, writing, encouraging people, even correcting and disciplining them if need be. Paying a pastor a salary has become the traditional way for a church to support their pastor/elder. The best way for the church to honor their pastor is to pay them a living wage, or, to pay them all that they feasibly can. If that doesn't quite come up to the level of a wage a family can live on and pay their basic bills, and the pastor knows that the church is paying him all they can afford – it is still honoring him – because the church is doing what it can! *Having pastored small town churches for almost my entire adulthood, I have always accepted that I was not going to make big money doing what I am doing. So, I have accepted salaries with previous churches that put us below the official poverty line – even substantially below! But it was all the church could afford, so it was what it was! I figured that if the church grew, then they would be in a position to hike my salary. I knew that was the only way it was going to happen, and have always accepted that. So this part of our text is not talking about making a pastor twice as financially prosperous as everyone else, but it is talking about being as financially generous as a church *can* be to their pastor – within reason, of course!



in that regard, some pastors are financially obsessed and they use this passage and others like it to drain their congregation of every last dollar! They end up becoming quite prosperous, owning luxury cars, more than one house, a horse ranch, or whatever their little hearts desire! They teach that this is the will of God – that the Lord's servant should live like a little king - and that this honors God! They are self-serving, greedy men who masquerade as shepherds, but are obviously in it for themselves! I don't want to belabor that point, but point out that it exists.

Bottom line - a church should do what they can. Just common sense tells us that the pastor should have a salary that is more than some in the congregation and less than others. If the pastor is careful with his money, like anyone else who knows how to handle their money, he can do just fine!

We always treat each other with respect, even when we disagree or are not getting along. We act with restraint! There is never a moment in the lives of Christ-followers that self-discipline and self-restraint do not apply. But sometimes pastors have to be let go, and sometimes board members must resign, because it is the right thing. But the people of the church must insist upon it with humility, and with a genuinely heavy heart – not with outrage and malice! It is a lot easier to just let ourselves go and verbally vomit all over someone who we think deserves it,.. but it is all wrong for Christ-followers to ever do that! But no one said that following Jesus is easier – especially in the short run! The long term benefits of following Christ are great, but often the harder thing to do in the short run. Let **them** act horribly, but don't you EVER join them in it by reciprocating. *Back when I was a young man, a social trend sprang up and became widespread. It was a decadent spectacle called mudwrestling, and it was always a bar event, and mainly women did it while the men gathered around and watched and cat-called and egged them on! Much to the men's delight, the women soon became a sorry spectacle of mud and torn clothing, demeaning themselves for the entertainment of the crowd! A Christ-follower does not climb down into the mud and demean themselves with others that are more that willing to go that low. We carry the person of the Holy Spirit of God around inside of us! Would we really take Him down into the mud with us?! No! Others would, and many give themselves permission - but we cannot! When we do, we have given in to the enemy of our souls, Satan, who has taken us captive to do and say things that discredit Jesus!



Paul switches to another aspect of leadership – to the matter of accusations. A church leader is in a terribly vulnerable position. His reputation can be ruined in a moment if someone just hints or whispers that the pastor or one of the elders has a moral problem, or that he might be a thief, or if a woman exits the pastor's office and claims that he was inappropriate with her! There does not need to be a grain of truth to it, but just the fact that it was said by someone puts a church leader in the terrible position of trying to deny it while not being able to **prove** his innocence, since it is a he-said/she-said situation. An accusation is enough to destroy a person's life! In today's bizarre world, hysteria jumps right over due process to scream "guilty"! The law of love does not let us do that. We must investigate thoroughly!

That is why a wise man will not let himself get into a situation where he can even be accused! He puts policies in place where he is not in a room alone with a woman who is not his wife, but always has someone in the building and the door to the room at least partially open. That is also to ensure that no accusation will stick, and no actual temptation will be acted upon! if any church leader does not have such policies in place, he is reckless at best, and if he continues his risky behavior, then it is curious, and even suspicious – and there should be censure for it!

But then it says that the church is to be **IMPARTIAL**. If a pastor or another church leader is at fault in some matter, or even a good friend in the church, then Christ-followers need to follow the truth. Of course we have loyalties and friendships, but our **primary** loyalty lies with Christ, and therefore if the truth leads to strong or indisputable evidence that the pastor, church leader, or our friend is the guilty party, well then, we side with justice, not with loyalties! God hates it when the guilty go unpunished and the innocent receive the punishment the guilty should have had! How can anyone go along with something like that and sleep nights?! If I did even cooperated with a scheme like that I would continue to lose sleep until I made it right! I know that about myself. I couldn't do it!



There are references in the New Testament to the rich getting preferential treatment in the church. James is incensed by such behavior. **[James 2:1-6a]** It is unconscionable that this should happen in a church, yet it happens all the time! How many factory or retail or service industry workers sit on the elder boards of big city megachurches? Usually none! Those seats at the table are reserved for owners of businesses, CEOs of companies, doctors and lawyers, academicians, architects, and so on - all white collar jobs – people either from the higher end of the middle class, or those genuinely of the “upper class”. If a church does this, and many do, is wrong any way you look at it! There should be no class distinctions in the church. Having a lot of money should not buy one extra gram of privilege over someone else with little money! The wealthy do not impress God! The poor do not impress Him either, by the way. It is the quality and Christ-likeness of one's character, a love for Christ and people, a servant's heart, that qualifies them for leadership, **period!**

At the same time, a sociopathic predator who has wormed his way into church leadership can abuse his office and hurt women, children,.. even men, for that matter! If he is careful and crafty, under this rule, if he's careful that there are no witnesses, he could get away with it forever, right? So this is not a one-size-fits-all rule! If anyone sees a pattern of accusations, or of reckless/questionable behavior, even without witnesses, then it must be confronted and corrected, or else! A church must not enable an unscrupulous, unethical, untruthful man. He does not get more consideration than the next person. If justice is applied equally to everyone, he will not **need** anything extra!